

March 13, 2022

To Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, distinguished members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary. My name is Juan Fonseca Tapia, and I am a community organizer at the [Center for Leadership and Justice](#), home of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA).

I am writing **IN SUPPORT** of:

- [S.B. No. 387](#) AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE.
- [S.B. No. 392](#) AN ACT CONCERNING STATEMENTS MADE BY JUVENILES.

I am writing **IN STRONG OPPOSITION** to the following bills:

- [S.B. No. 365](#) AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORMS
- [S.B. No. 388](#) AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEFENSE OF A PERSON OR A PERSON'S DWELLING, PLACE OF WORK OR MOTOR VEHICLE.
- [H.B. No. 5418](#) AN ACT REVISING JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE STATUTES AND INSURANCE STATUTES CONCERNING THEFT OF A MOTOR VEHICLE
- [H.B. No. 5417](#) AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE AND SERVICES AND FIREARMS BACKGROUND CHECKS.
- [S.B. No. 386](#) AN ACT CONCERNING A STUDY OF THE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY LAWS OF THIS STATE.
- [S.B. No. 16](#) AN ACT ADDRESSING GUN VIOLENCE AND JUVENILE CRIME.

The Center For Leadership and GHIAA opposes bills rooted in white supremacy and permeated with racist systems designed to harm and dehumanize people of color. GHIAA is comprised of 50 institutions representing over 20,000 individuals. We, as an organization, have repeatedly asked for an investment in our communities to have access to the things that make us feel secure. However, the legislature continues to respond to these asks with little funding and “solutions” that are deficit-based. Further, they are designed to maintain, protect and expand prisons created to punish and further disenfranchise Black and Brown youth. We should instead be investing in our young people and communities of color throughout Connecticut.

We have lost over 96,000 Connecticut residents to COVID-19, and these irreplaceable losses have uncovered the pervasive and deadly inequalities and wealth disparities that we have in this country. Our governmental institutions have failed to meet the needs of those who have been affected most, and some politicians have used this pandemic to build a political power base driven by fear and lies.

Facebook groups, newspapers, and meetings in white suburban towns have all been used to push the fear and lies by focusing on upticks in car thefts and decontextualized, ‘tough on crime’ narratives about urban youth infiltrating these white suburban neighborhoods. This dangerous rhetoric is based on the same pattern that birthed the war on drugs and destroyed an entire generation of Black and Brown men and their families and communities along with them.

These immoral and short-sighted bills have been drafted by political agendas under a public safety banner. We cannot allow racist groups of people and politicians to continue equating incarceration, punishment, and policing as public safety. This psychological manipulation makes it more and more difficult for people to realize that unsafe communities exist because of the absence of the resources and systems that make us secure, such as housing, food, and physical and mental health. Developing social safety net programs that would allow people to access the necessary resources to meet their most basic needs would eliminate the need for prisons and police to be present in our communities, and this is what the legislature should focus on.

While politicians, like Representative Craig Fishbein, were pushing fearmongering, racists, and misinformation campaigns, [students and educators continued to face mental health crises](#) in and out of the classroom due to a lack of access to mental health resources. While the Republican Caucus held "Tough on Crime" press conferences, [thousands of undocumented families faced illness and agonized in pain because our state continues to deny them access to healthcare](#). While Representative Jill Barry talked to media outlets about feeling unsafe at home, the CT Fair Housing Center [reported](#) there were 1,148 evictions filed, and out of, 1,148, 292 families were thrown to the streets.

If the legislature passes bills grounded in fearmongering, our communities will continue to deteriorate, our families will continue to be broken, and there will still be legal avenues to harm and kill poor people and Black and Brown people.

We need you to be accountable to the communities that elected you and to listen to youth voices, our 50 congregations, and our faith leaders and consider the recommendations submitted by youth justice advocates from the **Justice Juvenile Policy Oversight Committee** and the **Community First Coalition** along with grassroots groups from around the state. These groups are offering the members of this committee and our public officials the opportunity to work collectively to create and implement solutions that will meet our children's needs and restore our communities. Connecticut has the opportunity to meet the moment. Let us work together to defeat these bills and continue building a state that supports our young people.

I urge you to SUPPORT [S.B. No. 392](#) and [S.B. No. 387](#) with the recommendations submitted by the **Connecticut Justice Alliance** and the **TOW Youth Justice Institute**. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today and feel free to reach out if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

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